
How to chair an effective meeting.

A road map for getting the best result possible from every meeting you chair.

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Meetings can be one of your most effective tools or a total waste of time. Because they are an important part of nearly every organisation, it's important to have a game plan for getting the most out of the time you spend in any meeting.

The most important role in a meeting is that of the chair, the person in charge of conducting the meeting. Chairing a meeting is a critical skill for anyone aspiring to, or holding, a position of leadership.

In this how-to guide, I have provided a road map for getting the best result possible from every meeting you chair.

Mindset

For the chair, the single most critical element of conducting an effective meeting is having the right mindset about how it is conducted and what the outcomes will be. There are three principles to follow.

1. Have a plan

Never start a meeting without an objective (or set of objectives) and a plan to reach it, which we call an agenda. No exemptions.

2. Be the leader

As the chair of the meeting, you are in charge. People are looking to you to lead the meeting, keep them engaged and on task, and achieve the set objectives. It's important that you do not shy away from this responsibility. Assume control, be confident and ensure everyone's time is respected.

3. Reach the objectives

Clarity is important for everyone, so you need to begin your meeting with the end in mind. Keep people focused on what you are trying to achieve, and don't walk away without clear, specific, written agreement on what comes next.

Before the meeting.

- 1** Plan the agenda with input from the others who will be at the meeting, or whose opinion is important to reaching the agreed objectives. Include items brought to you by other members if they are relevant. Decide the order and timing of the agenda, and who will speak to each item.

- 2** Identify whether agenda items are for information, discussion or a decision.

- 3** Be well briefed about each item, and the actions taken since the last meeting.

- 4** Ensure all necessary background papers (including the last meeting's minutes) are sent out with the agenda beforehand.

- 5** Ensure that all relevant practical arrangements have been made. For example, ensure that the room layout is correct and materials, such as whiteboards, are available.

- 6** Arrive on time. To be early is to be on time, to be on time is to be late. To be late is unforgivable.

During the meeting.

Communicate

- Start the meeting. Make any necessary introductions.
- Receive apologies for absence.
- Ensure that additions or amendments to the minutes are recorded.
- Set the scene. State the objectives of the meeting.

Control

- Maintain control. Set out any time limits.
- Allow flexibility and freedom of expression.
- Keep to the agenda.
- Ensure time is used effectively.
- Ensure that proper minutes are taken.

Coax

- Ensure full participation.
- Draw out quieter members and manage those who are monopolising the meeting.
- Be prepared to highlight issues that no one else will, and to be the one who asks the awkward questions.

Compare

- Weigh up contributions impartially.
- Summarise all the points in favour of a proposal against all the points not in favour.

Clarify

- Ensure everyone understands what is being discussed.
- Summarise.
- If jargon and abbreviations are used, ensure all present understand them.
- Record decisions and who will be responsible for implementing them.

Decision making

- Ensure that decisions are taken in the context of the organisation's strategy, and that they are recorded together with who is going to implement them.

At the end of the meeting.

- 1 Summarise the decisions taken and the action points to be followed up: who is responsible, and by when.

- 2 Agree a date for the next meeting. It is usually best to set dates for the year's meetings well in advance.

- 3 Agree what special items will be put on the agenda of the next meeting, and what work needs to be done, by whom.

- 4 Ensure that the minutes are written up, checked by the chair and sent out in good time.

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Importance.
Seek to be a person of Value.**

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